

COUNCILLOR LES HAMILTON

**6 Nursery Close
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To: Policy & Resources Committee Date: 25 November 2003
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As part of Overview and Scrutiny Organisation Committee's role in performance monitoring, the Committee on 17th November were given information on Children, Families and Schools by the Director and Committee Chair. Reports were presented on Best Value Performance, the Social Services Inspectorate Spring Delivery and Improvement Statement, and comparative data on looked after children from our benchmark group of local authorities.

Members were pleased to see improvements against education-related performance indicators, and said that staff in both education and children's social services were doing a good job under difficult circumstances.

However, there was deep concern at the considerable pressures under which children's social care services are operating at present. Members were especially worried at the dramatic rise in recent years in the numbers of looked after children in Brighton and Hove per 10,000 children and consequently the number of children allocated to each social worker in comparison with other local authorities. They were alarmed that there was not one external applicant for 17 social worker vacancies here.

In discussing the key issues and recalling the Victoria Climbié tragedy where the caseload of the social workers was a contributing factor, it was widely felt that child protection was the single most important responsibility of the Council and arguably the most sensitive and difficult for front-line staff.

There was support for the department's work in analysing the underlying causes of the increase in numbers of children in need and looked after, in developing good quality indicators to track preventive measures, and the wider action being taken to improve the way the service works and so to increase the star rating of the council within the Comprehensive Performance Assessment framework.

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Labour Member for SOUTH PORTSLADE Ward

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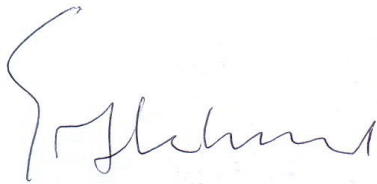
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Members said the current under-resourcing of children's social care could lead to significant risks to vulnerable children, if it were to continue. As OSOC has an overview of all service areas the Committee felt that this area stands out as needing particular attention as regards resources.

Recognising that the situation as regards key workers is part of a wider national difficulties OSOC nevertheless recommends that reducing service pressures in children's social care is prioritised when setting next year's Council budget.



Councillor Les Hamilton



Councillor Geoffrey Theobald

(Chair and Deputy Chair on behalf of OSOC)